

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service**  
**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Inventory—Nomination Form**

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Item number N-5276

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INVENTORY FORM: WHITE CLAY CREEK HUNDRED MULTIPLE RESOURCE AREA

9. A. Property Name: Old Fort Church (N-5276)  
North Old Baltimore Pike  
Christiana, Delaware

B. Location and Verbal Foundary Description:

Old Fort Church is located on the west side of Old Baltimore Pike between Delaware Route 273 and Brown's Lane. The site is almost directly across from the junction with Bayard Road. The building sits on an L-shaped 0.38 acre parcel that fronts 60 feet on Old Baltimore Pike and has a maximum depth of 227.4 feet (1982 New Castle County Property Tax Maps; Map Number 9-30.3, Parcel 17).

UTM Reference: 18/443430/4390890  
U.S.G.S. Quadrangle: Newark East, Del.

C. Owner: Union A. M. E. Church  
c/o Rev. James S. Matthews  
32 North Old Baltimore Pike  
Christiana, Delaware 19702

D. Property Description:

Old Fort Church is a one story, gable-roofed brick structure that was constructed in 1897. Its three bay by three bay rectangular, gable front plan rests on a brick foundation with a full basement below. The exterior walls are laid in six course common bond, while the gables are sheathed with various types of decorative wood shingles painted dark green. The shingles alternate haxagonal, pointed and round butts every three rows. The main decorative feature of the building, however, is the modified lancet-type windows that illuminate the main block. These windows are composed of standard six-over-six sash windows with triangular transoms above. The shutters have been removed from these windows and sometime in the early 1940's stained glass panes were installed in the six-over-six sash. A mitred arch two-over-two sash window pierces the facade gable. The only structural changes in the building have been the addition of a brick, gable-roofed vestibule on the facade and an annex on the rear.

A cemetery that was created after 1897 is located to the rear of the Church.

E. Justification of Boundaries:

The boundaries chosen for this building have been set at the property lines of the legal parcel on which it stands. The parcel is bounded by modern residential development on the north, west, and south, and by a busy road on the east.

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F. Significance:

Old Fort Church is significant because it represents an aspect of the contributions of the black community to the history of White Clay Creek Hundred. Old Fort Church is eligible for the National Register under criteria A and C, as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction and for its association with events which made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the local past.

A Union American Methodist Church was built on Schoolbell Road (in Christiana Hundred) near Christiana in 1819, and in 1850 a brick structure replaced the original frame one. By the 1880's the church had grown substantially, and since most of the members lived in the Village of Christiana Bridge, a decision was made to move the Church into the Village of Old Baltimore Pike near the crest of the hill. In 1897, the Church was dismantled, the bricks were transported to the new site by horse and wagon where the women washed the bricks and the men reassembled the Church. Since there is no documentary evidence describing the Church before the move, it is not known if it was reassembled exactly in its original form. In the early nineteenth century the name of the Church was changed from Christiana U. A. M. E. Church to Old Fort U. A. M. E. Church. This occurred at a ceremony for the burning of the mortgage at which the congregation decided that having suffered and yet still having paid the debt faithfully, as a flock of Jesus Christ they wished to be called Old Fort.

For many years Old Fort was referred to as a "family church" because most of its members were related to the Neal family by blood or marriage. Five generations of Neals have attended this Church, however, other members have joined during the last five years.

Although it is unclear how much change occurred in the building when it was dismantled and moved, it can be safely assumed that the Church followed the same basic one story, gable front plan that it does in its current rebuilt state. This plan became almost standard for small congregations in the nineteenth century throughout the state. The distinctive feature on Old Fort that sets it apart from the others, however, is the stylized type of lancet window that was used. While most churches of this period employ either pointed-arch sash or elongated sash, Old Fort utilizes standard six-over-six sash that are surmounted by multi-light triangular transom lights to give the effect of lancet windows. This treatment not only creates a striking difference compared to other small-scale churches in the area, but also provides a creative solution for achieving a desired style given limited materials.

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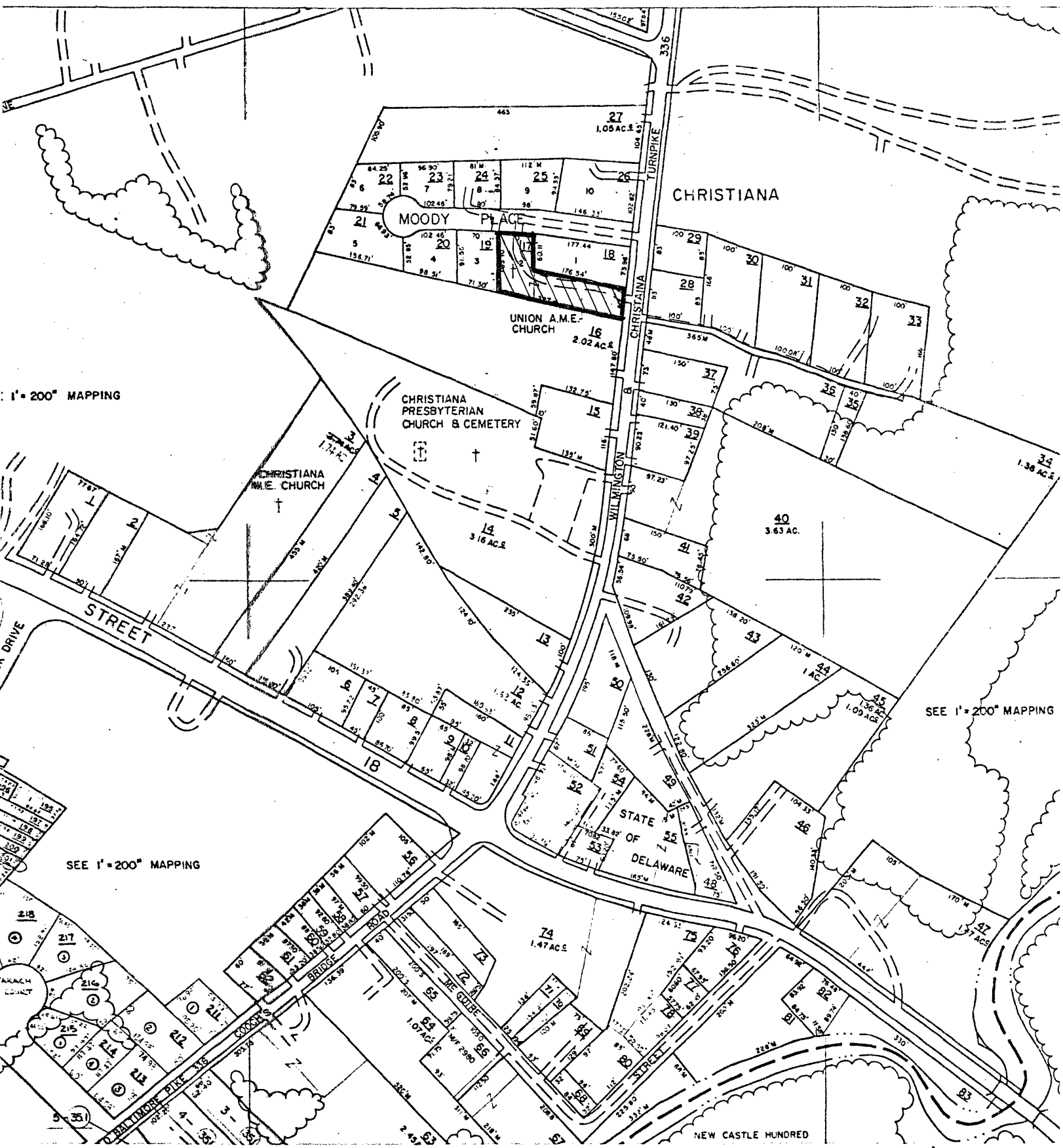
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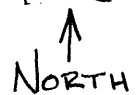
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Level of Significance:

The level of significance claimed for the Old Fort Church is local. It has unusual, if not unique, features which make it of interest to the architectural and social history of the County as a whole.



SKETCH MAP



9. Old Fort Church (N-5276)  
 New Castle County Property  
 Tax Map, 1982  
 Map No. 9-30.3, Parcel 17  
 Scale 1 inch = 200 feet